

## MRS. LESLIE SPEAKS

She is Hurt by the Way the Newspapers Treat Her.

### BURDEN OF HER COMPLAINT.

Mr. Willie Wilde and His Collection of Clippings—Mrs. Leslie-Wilde's Acquaintance with Albert Hope.

Great is the penalty of celebrity! See a woman but brush its outskirts and down come the sledge hammers! Her life, her business, her name, her friends—aye, her home and her husband are no longer her own, to say nothing of such prerogatives as her age and her love affairs. These were my thoughts as I sat chatting not long ago with Mr. Willie Wilde and his wife, Mrs. Frank Leslie-Wilde, in hearing them laugh and talk, seeing them smile and frown over the newspaper clippings which recorded their genealogies, incomes, "age, sex and previous condition of servitude."

Of course I had met Mr. Wilde with my American citizenship's worth of prejudice. In fact, I think I preface my congratulations by calling him a transatlantic pirate, a poacher, and so forth, but had the girls taken off my sword by the nicest of smiles, the heartiest of hand-



MR. WILLIE WILDE.

shakes, and the gallant assurance that America, instead of having lost a daughter, had shared the fate of all good mothers-in-law and gained a son. At this time—not long after his marriage—Mr. Wilde was the manner of man in one's mind on hearing that good old roasting chorus from "Pinafore!"

For he is an Englishman! Big, brawny, square shouldered, free fluted—not a bad man by any means to stand between a woman and the sledge-hammers!

Mr. Wilde is anything but a young man. His hair is streaked with gray, his beard so trimmed as to cut out the gray about the chin, and under his good blue eyes are the footprints of late hours and high living. There is the portly figure and the heavy veins of the hands showing the culmination, not the incipency, of age.

Mrs. Leslie is no longer young. It were an insult to her work and experience to call her such. She is better than young—she is the full grown, capable woman. Her skin is clear and smooth, her eyes bright and quick to fill with tears, and her figure almost girlish in its rounded symmetry. At her worst, in the untimely glare of day and her office dress, she looked fully young enough for Mr. Wilde.

"These notices must be very amusing to you, Mr. Wilde," I said, referring to the clippings.

He smiled, then frowned. "Yes," he answered, "if they were only not vulgar. Vulgarly in journalism, like vituperation in argument, weakens the point."

Among these clippings was one from a London paper, which, in speaking of Mr. Wilde as a "commencer," went on to say that he was no "common commencer, but a gentleman, a journalist, a musician and a man of marked individuality."

The gross misconception which the papers have put on Mrs. Leslie's remark that her devotion to Lady Wilde had much to do with her marrying her son is most unjust. It is a well known fact that Mrs. Leslie and Lady Wilde have been the warmest of friends for eight years. It is a friendship of which Mrs. Leslie, as a much younger woman, a visitor to England and a fellow journalist, may well be proud. Her reference to it as bearing upon her marriage to Mr. Wilde was the natural tribute of friend to friend, daughter to mother.

A pretty incident showing the oneness of these famous women was the joint appearance of their photographs and pictures in a Dublin magazine called "The Lady of the House," dated Sept. 15, when neither they nor the public knew that they were ever to be more closely united. In this article Mrs. Leslie is spoken of as "the beautiful newspaper queen," and Lady Wilde as "Speranza," who still queens it in her magnificent drawing rooms at 144 Oakley street, London, where come together men and women of all nationalities, each one distinguished in his or her way, the American element, perhaps, predominating and numbering among its representatives such women as Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, Louise Chandler Moulton, Mrs. Frank Leslie, Mrs. Proctor, etc.

This article then goes on to mention Lady Wilde's latest book, a collection of essays bearing the title, "Men, Women and Books," and dealing with such subjects as Jean Paul Richter, The Gironde, Miss Martineau, Lady Blessington, George Eliot, Lord Lytton, Disraeli, Thomas Moore, Leigh Hunt, Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson, etc.

Because being able to write charmingly of all these distinguished personages, Lady Wilde knew and entertained Browning, Carlyle, Petrie, Lever, Father Prout, Thackeray, Denis Florence McCarthy, etc.

I don't blame Mrs. Leslie for being proud of the friendship of such a woman and marrying her son.

But the interview I have written of was more than a month ago. Since then the light of the honeymoon has waned for this happy couple and sickness and worry have cast their dark shadow over them.

Mr. Wilde has been prostrated by a serious attack of hemorrhage of the stomach, a malady which came near ending his life more than a year ago and to future and fatal recurrence of which his physicians say he is liable at any time. The evidence of suffering and what visits are on Mrs. Wilde's face

and the pallor of death and apprehension on his. Yet their home is Liberty Hall, where aspiring artists—American, English, German or Kanschathian—are welcomed with true democratic equality, to meet each other and feel the cheerfulness of home and hospitality.

As for the "worry" referred to, it is the connection of Mrs. Leslie's name—however creditably—with the recent sensation of young Albert Hope, the forger and debaucher.

Said Mrs. Leslie: "This is the cut from my country's papers which has rent my heart. It is the record of an inverted good deed which almost tempts me never to do another. From my first meeting with that unfortunate boy I have been to him what I would bless any good woman to be to a misguided brother of mine adrift in a city of temptations, beset by the curses of an inherited fortune and bad associates. When I saw, more than a year ago, that he was falling from his former state of worthiness and reliability I withdrew from him my friendship and endorsement. I made him a present of a sum of money he asked me to lend him, and expressed my surprise and disapproval at his continuing to support himself in luxurious idleness by borrowing money which he had no sort of resources to repay. He was only an innocent, weak lad, so far as I could judge.

"I no more suspected him of crime and debauchery than I suspected his pure minded and child-faced friend, Tommy Russell. Yet, when the worst came and Hope was in prison in Philadelphia, I came once more to his rescue. I forgave him the offenses he had committed against me in using my name for the purpose of inducing loans, and the forged check upon my bankers which he then had upon his person, and offered to help him out by effecting a compromise with the Philadelphia bank upon whose charge he was then under arrest. Before these negotiations could be effected it was my unpleasant task to see the infamous book which he had written for Tommy Russell, and which was in the hands of the authorities. Though touched by his grateful references to myself and my past kindness to him, I was shocked and disgusted with the horrible revelations of the book as touching his own life and habits. I felt that there was no hope for a soul, much less a life, steeped in such wickedness and unhealthfulness.

I directed my agent to stop negotiations in his behalf, and sorrowfully washed my hands of the whole affair. "Oh! I am hurt to the quick by the papers' treatment of me in this matter. Every word I have said in friendly exculpation of the boy has been grossly misconstrued. What have I done to deserve such unfraternal consideration? I love the papers, and have tried to show my appreciation of their past goodness to me. They stood by me through my dark times, encouraging me to stand up under the heavy load of wrongs and persecution and to go on inch by inch, redeeming my dead husband's financial honor.

"My recent marriage seems to have opened upon me the vials of my country's wrath. I was alone (for a good income and friends do not fill a woman's heart), I wanted a home and protection and love and peace as other women have. I have no mother, father, sister, brother, child or any near and dear kin. Why should the newspaper people make one of their own profession ridiculous?

"In all my newspaper work—and I am now writing for several syndicates and of course my own publications—I have never lowered my pen to say aught against man or woman. Of course I could have done so. My ears are not alone holden to Dame Rumor's voice and the rattle of family skeletons. These swords of persecution are generally two edged. Few of us mortals are able to accept the Master's pitying challenge, 'Cast ye the first stone.'

"See here, how the papers change!" and Mrs. Wilde got up and handed me a scrapbook of clippings. "Here is one from one of our most conservative and important dailies. It goes on to say of me at the time of my reputed engagement to the Marquis de Louville: 'Mrs. Leslie was seated in her luxurious apartments at the Gerlach. She was dressed in black silk with some rare lace about her throat and wrists and looked even younger than the London records had made her out—thirty-eight.' "That was in 1890. Now, in 1891, I am made out by this same paper, in an editorial, to be old enough for Mr. Wilde's mother—about seventy."

Alas! the world goes on, and business is business. BELLE HUNT.

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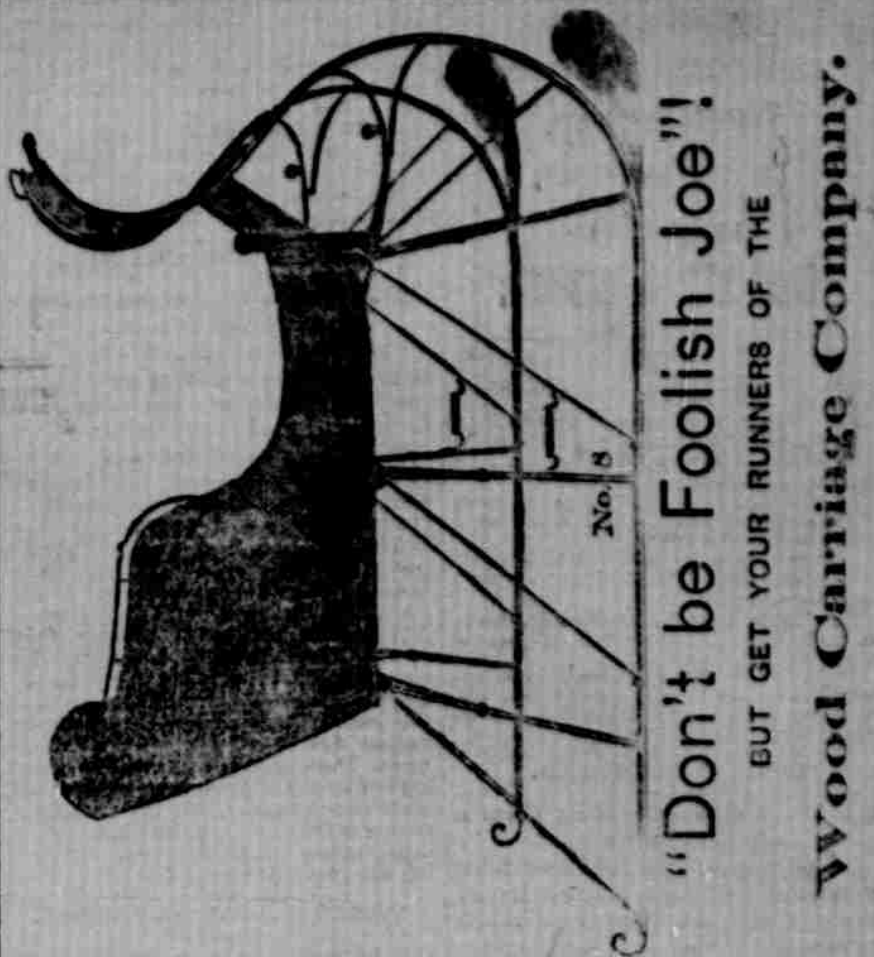
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